

Comments on CINCPAC Proposal to Mine NVN Ports

PACOM review(s) completed.

CINCPAC Proposal

CINCPAC's recommendation to the JCS that the North Vietnamese ports be mined is deficient for the following reasons:

- (1) The proposal overstates the importance that mining would have on North Vietnam's economy and its ability to continue the war, especially the insurgency in South Vietnam.
- (2) The proposal gives inadequate recognition to the ability of the North Vietnamese to circumvent the mining by using alternative Chinese ports and increasing the use of rail lines and road transport from Communist China.
- (3) The proposal ignores the fact that the bulk of military aid from the USSR and China is imported by rail. Although the Chinese have probably delayed some Soviet shipments, North Vietnam is still probably receiving almost all of the Soviet military aid shipped across China.
- (4) The proposal ignores political repercussions including the possibility of a confrontation with the USSR as well as unfavorable Free World reaction.

The Effect of Mining

1. It is agreed that mining the ports of North Vietnam would result in a severe disruption to the normal transport system and the effectiveness with which it moves both imports and exports. Almost all export trade would cease and North Vietnam's foreign exchange earnings would be negligible. About 70 percent of the volume of North Vietnam's imports and 90 percent of its exports were shipped by sea in 1966.

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2. Over the longer term, however, alternative means of supply abroad could be developed, and the impact would be a delay rather than a denial of essential imports. Military shipments, which presently move to North Vietnam by rail, would not be affected directly by the mining. Other war-supporting supplies could be imported by using excess rail and highway capacity. On the export side, the loss of foreign exchange would not be critical.

Repercussions and Circumvention

1. If the mining of the ports were carried out without warning, a number of foreign flag ships probably would be caught in the ports. The average daily number of ships at Haiphong during July-December 1966 included ten ships; four Soviet, two Eastern European, two Chinese, and two Free World. In addition, two to four ships were loading at Cam Pha and Hon Gai on any day.

2. If only mines effective against deep-draft ships are used in the port areas, it is probable that coastal and inland watercraft could be used to transport supplies from ships anchored outside mined areas. There are substantial numbers of motor-powered and sailing junks, barges, lighters, and other craft operating along the southern coast of China, along the northern coast of North Vietnam, and in the harbors and inland waterways of North Vietnam which could be made available for such movements. The number of such available small craft could, if properly organized, handle a volume of general cargo corresponding to the daily volume estimated to have moved

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through Haiphong in 1965 and 1966. An increase in air strikes would complicate off-shore lightering but such movements could be made under the cover of darkness. Although port facilities, warehouses, and transport facilities at Haiphong and other ports could be largely immobilized by air strikes, it would probably entail large civilian casualties and also would endanger foreign ships and crews.

3. Although the use of mines effective against shallow-draft watercraft in conjunction with air strikes against the ports and watercraft probably could eliminate almost all lightering operations, important imports could be moved by land transport. Increased shipments could be made by rail from the USSR through China. Foreign ships also could unload at Fort Bayard and other Chinese ports where imports could then be moved by rail to North Vietnam.

4. The most important rail line for imports, running through Dong Dang, would provide sufficient capacity for a large portion of the normal seaborne imports of North Vietnam and for all supplies essential for the war effort. The Hanoi-Lao Cai rail line, although disrupted for through service during much of 1965 and 1966, could serve as another alternative route, especially if the North Vietnamese were to put forth greater effort to keep it repaired. Additional railroad equipment could be made available almost immediately by Communist China and ^{by} other Communist countries over a period of weeks. Thus it is estimated that sufficient equipment and excess capacity is available in the railroad lines to carry any tonnage that might be diverted

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to them by mining North Vietnam's ports. Although increased air strikes would impede rail shipments, the air effort against rail lines in the North would have to be at a much higher level than that achieved by Rolling Thunder in 1966.

5. Although road transport has not been used for a significant quantity of North Vietnamese foreign trade, it is available as an alternative to sea and rail transport. A final alternative would be rail-water shipments using the new railroad within Communist China to Yunnan Province and thence via the Red River to Hanoi. If these latter alternatives are used for import traffic, obviously they too would have to be taken under sustained air attack in order to enhance the effectiveness of the mining program.

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